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NO. 38

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THE VAULT OF

HORROR[®]

FEATURING...



THE VAULT-KEEPER



THE CRYPT-KEEPER



THE OLD WITCH



ARE YOU A RED DUPE?

IN THE TOWN OF GAZOOSKY IN THE HEART OF SOVIET RUSSIA, YOUNG MELVIN BLIZUNKEN - SKOVITCHSKY PUBLISHED A **COMIC MAGAZINE...**



... SO THEY CAME AND **SMASHED** HIS FOUR-COLOR PRESS...



... AND **HUNG POOR MELVIN** THE NEXT MORNING!



- HERE IN AMERICA, WE CAN **STILL** PUBLISH COMIC MAGAZINES, NEWSPAPERS, SLICKS, BOOKS AND THE BIBLE. WE DON'T **HAVE** TO SEND THEM TO A CENSOR FIRST. NOT **YET...**
- BUT THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE IN AMERICA WHO WOULD **LIKE** TO CENSOR... WHO WOULD **LIKE** TO SUPPRESS COMICS. IT ISN'T THAT THEY DON'T LIKE COMICS FOR **THEM!** THEY DON'T LIKE THEM FOR **YOU!**
- THESE PEOPLE SAY THAT **COMIC BOOKS** AREN'T AS GOOD FOR CHILDREN AS **NO** COMIC BOOKS, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. SOME OF THESE PEOPLE ARE NO-GOODS. SOME ARE DO-GOODERS. SOME ARE WELL-MEANING. AND SOME ARE JUST PLAIN MEAN.
- BUT WE ARE CONCERNED WITH AN AMAZING REVELATION. AFTER MUCH SEARCHING OF NEWSPAPER FILES, WE'VE MADE AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY:

THE GROUP MOST ANXIOUS TO DESTROY COMICS ARE THE COMMUNISTS!

- WE'RE SERIOUS! NO KIDDIN'! **HERE! READ THIS:**

THE [COMMUNIST] "DAILY WORKER" OF JULY 13, 1953 BITTERLY ATTACKED THE ROLE OF:

"...SO-CALLED 'COMICS' IN BRUTALIZING AMERICAN YOUTH, THE BETTER TO PREPARE THEM FOR MILITARY SERVICE IN IMPLEMENTING OUR GOVERNMENT'S AIMS OF WORLD DOMINATION, AND TO ACCEPT THE ATROCITIES NOW BEING PERPETRATED BY AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND AIRMEN IN KOREA UNDER THE FLAG OF THE UNITED NATIONS."

THIS ARTICLE ALSO QUOTED **GERSHON LEGMAN** (WHO CLAIMS TO BE A GHOST WRITER FOR **DR. FREDERICK WERTHAM**, THE AUTHOR OF A RECENT SMEAR AGAINST COMICS PUBLISHED IN **"THE LADIES HOME JOURNAL"**). THIS SAME **G. LEGMAN**, IN ISSUE #3 OF **"NEUROTICA"**, PUBLISHED IN AUTUMN 1948, WILDLY CONDEMNED COMICS, ALTHOUGH ADMITTING THAT:

"THE CHILD'S NATURAL CHARACTER... MUST BE DISTORTED TO FIT CIVILIZATION... FANTASY VIOLENCE WILL PARALYZE HIS RESISTANCE, DIVERT HIS AGGRESSION TO UNREAL ENEMIES AND FRUSTRATIONS, AND IN THIS WAY PREVENT HIM FROM REBELLING AGAINST PARENTS AND TEACHERS... THIS WILL SIPHON OFF HIS RESISTANCE AGAINST SOCIETY, AND **PREVENT REVOLUTION.**"

- SO THE **NEXT** TIME SOME JOKER GETS UP AT A P.T.A. MEETING, OR STARTS JABBERING ABOUT THE "NAUGHTY COMIC BOOKS" AT YOUR LOCAL CANDY STORE, GIVE HIM THE **ONCE-OVER**. WE'RE NOT SAYING HE **IS** A COMMUNIST! HE MAY BE INNOCENT OF THE WHOLE THING! HE MAY BE A **DUPE!** HE MAY NOT EVEN **READ** THE "DAILY WORKER"! IT'S JUST THAT HE'S **SWALLOWED THE RED BAIT... HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER!**

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THE VAULT OF HORROR!

HEH, HEH! PILE ABOARD THE GOOD SHIP *SARCOPHAGUS*, ME HORRIBLE HEARTIES! THE MORGUE THE MERRIER, I ALWAYS SAY! YOU REMEMBER MY DEAR COMPANION, DON'T YOU? IN CASE SOME OF YOU ARE STRANGERS... THIS IS *DRUSILLA*, HOSTESS OF THE *VAULT*! YOU'LL BE SEEING A LOT OF HER! RIGHT NOW, THOUGH, YOUR SALTY OLD *VAULT-KEEPER* IS ABOUT TO SET TALE ON A TEMPEST-TOSSED *FRIGHT-SEEING* CRUISE BY WAY OF A GANGRENOUS-YELLOW GAZETTE I DUG UP HERE IN THE SLIMY DEPTHS OF THE *VAULT*! I VOW THIS BARNACLED BIT OF BILGE WILL SHIVER YOUR TIMBERS, MATEYS, SO HITCH UP YOUR MIZZENMASTS WHILE I UNRAVEL THE CREEPY CHRONICLE I CALL...

ANY SPORT in a STORM



OH, BUT THE SEA WAS ANGRY THAT NIGHT! SHE WAS A SEETHING SHREW! CRASHING, FOAMING AND HISSING, SHE BEAT AGAINST THE ROCK-BOUND ISLAND SHORE. THEN SHE WOULD SLINK BACK AND CURL UP INTO HERSELF, ONLY TO COME ROARING AT THE IMMOVABLE, SILENT ROCKS AGAIN...



THEN THE SEA, IN HER RAGE, HURLED HERSELF UPON THE SHORE, THUNDERED AGAINST THE CHALKY CLIFFS, DIGGING AT THEIR BATTERED SIDES! AND SHE REACHED WITH LONG, COLD, CLAWING FINGERS INTO THE CAVES SHE'D MADE INTO THE SMUGGLERS' CAVES, WHERE SHE TOYED WITH THEIR SKIFFS AND LAUNCHES...



THE STORM INVADIED THE INN FOR A MOMENT AS SHANNON ENTERED. THEN HE CLOSED IT OUT, CAST OFF HIS BRINE-DRENCHED COAT, AND STOOD WARMING HIS HANDS BEFORE THE FIRE...

... 'T WAS ON JUST SUCH A NIGHT ME FATHER WAS CAUGHT AT SEA THAT SHE GOT HIM!



SHANNON GLARED DARKLY AS HE RECOGNIZED TIMOTHY O'ROURKE'S PIPING BROGUE...

AYE! THE SEA HAG REACHED UP WITH HER EIGHT SLIMY ARMS AND PLUCKED HIM, SCREAMIN', RIGHT OFF'N THE DECK! WE NEVER SEEN HIM AGAIN... NEVER!



HIGH ABOVE, THE WIND HOWLED AS THOUGH TRYING TO DROWN OUT THE ROARING FURY OF THE SEA! IT DROVE BLACK CLOUDS BENEATH THE SKY AS THOUGH TRYING TO HIDE, WITH A VEIL OF MURK, HER STORMY DISPOSITION...



SQUATTING ON A BLEAK, WINDSWEPT HUMMOCK, RATS-MOUTH INN STOOD LIKE AN OMINOUS, GREY, WEATHERED HULK. BUT THE RUGGED GIANT, LON SHANNON, FIXED HIS STEELY EYES ON THE INVITING WARMTH OF THE LIGHTS GLOWING THROUGH THE WINDOWS...



SHANNON BLASPHEMED IN A BOOMING VOICE, GROWLED HIS ORDER TO THE INNKEEPER, AND HIS MEN, AWARE OF HIS PRESENCE AT LAST, FELL INTO APPREHENSIVE SILENCE...

GROG, DODSON! AND MULL IT SO IT'LL BOIL MY INNARDS, OR I'LL DROWN YOU IN YOUR OWN SWILL!



THERE WAS A SNEER ON THE BIG MAN'S FACE. WITH THE STRENGTH OF HIS HARD GREY EYES ALONE HE BROUGHT THE RED-HEADED LAD TO HIS FEET...

SO THE *SEA HAG* GOT YOUR OLD MAN, DID SHE, O'ROURKE?

AYE! THAT SHE DID, SIR! YOU HAVE ME *WORD* ON IT!



AND I SUPPOSE YOU HEARD FROM YOUR FATHER'S *GHOST* WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM...?

NO, SIR...WE HEARD IT FROM HIS BEST FRIEND, WHO'S DEAD NOW, REST HIS SOUL!



PFAH! NARY A WITNESS, YOU LYIN' LITTLE SNEAK! *ONLY THE DEAD!*



THEN WITH A BRUTALITY THAT MADE EVEN HIS HARD-BITTEN SMUGGLER CREW GASP, SHANNON DROVE HIS HUGE FIST AGAINST TIM O'ROURKE'S MOUTH...

'T'WILL BE A LONG TIME TILL YOUR ROTTEN TONGUE CAN SPEW OUT SUCH LIES AGAIN!



ARE YOU ALL GOIN' TO BE TAKEN IN BY A LIAR'S SUPERSTITIOUS BABBLING WHILE A SCHOONER WAITS A MILE OFF SHORE WITH THIRTY THOUSAND POUNDS IN SPICES, PERFUMES AND GEMS FOR US?



YE CAN SAY WHAT YE LIKE, LON SHANNON! BUT THE *SEA HAG* ABOUNDS TONIGHT...AND YE'LL NOT MAKE US SET FOOT IN A BOAT! NOT TONIGHT!

GO BACK TO YE HOMES, YE SNIVELIN' PACK O' WOMEN! I'LL GO IT ALONE, THEN! AND THERE'S A FIFTY POUND BONUS FOR ANY MAN WHAT'LL STAND UP AN' JOIN ME!!

FIFTY, CHIEF? AYE, SIR... I'LL GO W' YE!



RELUCTANTLY, THE OTHER MEN AGREED TO HELP SHANNON LAUNCH A BOAT, AND A FEW MINUTES LATER, MUTTERING DARKLY, THEY LEFT THE COMFORT OF THE INN...

THERE'LL BE NO CUT FOR YOU HEATHEN COWARDS THIS TRIP! SCOLLAY AND I'LL BE GETTIN' YOUR SHARES!

THE DIRTY LITTLE SNEAK'D CRAWL THROUGH 'ADES ON 'IS BELLY FOR 'ALF A 'UNDRED POUNDS, 'E WOULD!



WITH DIFFICULTY, THE SMUGGLERS HELPED SHANNON AND SCOLLAY PUT TO SEA IN A LAUNCH! THE ENRAGED SEA SEETHED HER DEFIANCE! SHE HEAVED AND ROLLED, TRIED IN A DOZEN DIFFERENT WAYS TO ENGULF THEM! SHE CALLED UPON THE WIND AND LIGHTNING, DASHED HERSELF AGAINST THE ROCKS IN RENEWED BURSTS OF TEMPER... BUT SOMEHOW THE LAUNCH OUTWITTED HER...



THEN THE STORM BROKE IN ALL ITS FURY! MOUNTAINS OF WAVES TRIED TO SWALLOW THE SMALL CRAFT! THE WIND TORE, LIGHTNING MENACED, THUNDER THREATENED, BUT THE GIANT SHANNON ONLY LAUGHED!



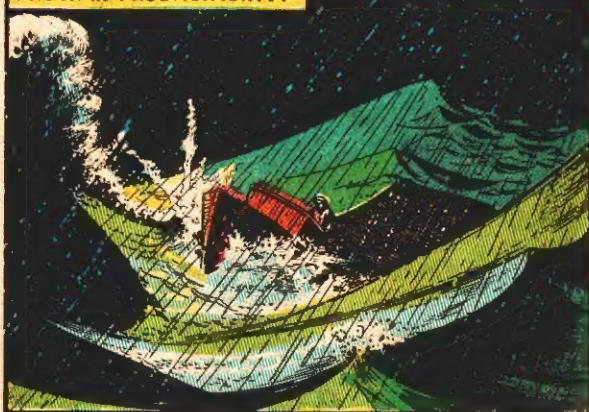
TRY YOUR THOUSAND TRICKS, YOU BILLIOUS, UGLY OLD HARRIDAN! SHOW ME YOUR SEA HAG AN' I'LL SPIT IN HER EYE!

WITH ONE POWERFUL HAND HE LIFTED THE COWERING SCOLLAY FROM THE CABIN. HIS LAUGHTER ROARED ABOVE THE WIND. SCOLLAY LAUGHED TOO... BUT ONLY WITH HIS MOUTH, FOR THE REST OF HIM WAS ALL TERROR...

WELL?! WHERE IS YOUR SEA HAG WITH HER EIGHT, SLIMEY, BARNACLED ARMS, EH?! TELL HER LON SHANNON IS WAITING!?



FOR TWO HOURS THE LAUNCH WOULD VANISH IN TROUGH AFTER TROUGH, AND THE SEA WOULD CLOSE ABOUT THEM, ONLY TO HAVE THE CRAFT LEAP TANTALIZINGLY OUT OF HER GRASP! THEN SHE'D FOAM, AND HISS, AND FROTH IN FRUSTRATION...



WE'RE LOST, SHANNON! IT'S THE SEA HAG! SHE'S LED US OFF COURSE! SHE TAKES A HUNDRED FORMS... SHE'S A DOLPHIN ONE MOMENT, A GRAB JUTTIN' OUT OF THE SEA, A TERN, A GULL...

OR MAYBE SHE'S THIS BOAT, YOU BLASTED LITTLE FOOL!

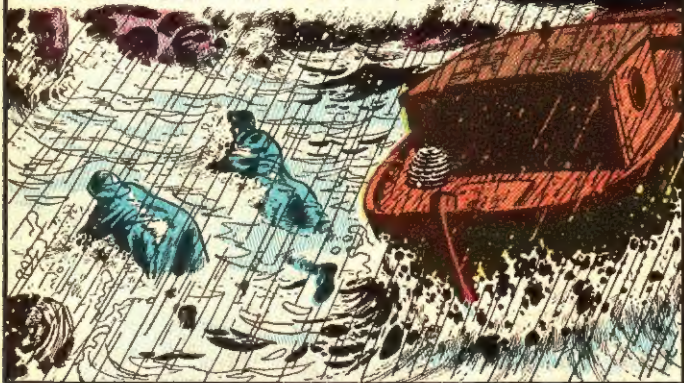


A GREAT SWELL LIFTED THE BOAT HIGH, CARRIED IT SWIFTLY FORWARD, AND SUDDENLY LOOMING OUT OF THE BLACKNESS, A HUGE, GREY, MOUNTAINOUS MASS OF BOULDERS CONFRONTED THEM...



THERE! THERE SHE IS! I TOLD YA, SHANNON!

THE SWELL SANK SWIFTLY, SPENDING ITSELF ON A SHORT, PEBBLY BEACH THAT SLOPED UP TO THE BOULDERS! THE TWO MEN WERE THROWN ROUGHLY TO THE BEACH WHERE THEY CLUNG WHILE THE RECEDING WATER SOUGHT TO DRAG THEM BACK. THE LAUNCH SETTLED QUIETLY ON THE PEBBLES, SMUGGLY SATISFIED AT HAVING DELIVERED THEM TO SAFETY...



SO THIS LITTLE CHUNK O' LAND IS YOUR SEA HAG, EH, SCOLLAY?! WELL, FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST, I'M GLAD TO BE RESTIN' ON 'ER BOSOM!

GREAT GLORY, CHIEF! LOOK!



A LIGHTHOUSE? I DON'T REMEMBER THIS ONE!

WE BEEN CARRIED A GOOD 'UNDRED MILES OFF-COURSE, THAT'S WHY YE DON'T KNOW 'ER! AYE! A GOOD 'UNDRED.. AN' NOT ENOUGH PETROL T' CARRY US MORE'N A DOZEN!



YOU'RE GOIN' UP, CHIEF? YE DON'T KNOW WHO'S UP THERE! MAYBE THE LAW...

STAY ON THE BEACH, IF YE BE AFRAID! I'M GOIN' UP T' DRY OUT... AN' T' GET A WARMIN' NIP IF THEY GOT ONE!



IN ANSWER TO SHANNON'S BOOMING FIST, THE DOOR CREAKED OPEN ON ITS SALT-CAKED HINGES...

ME NAME'S SHANNON, CAP'N! THIS HERE'S ME FRIEND SCOLLAY! THE SEA TOSSED US UP HERE! COULD WE DRY OUT FOR A BIT?

GLADLY, SIR! COME IN! MY NAME IS DANIELS!



CAPTAIN DANIELS LED THEM UP A SHORT, CIRCULAR IRON STAIRWAY AND INTO A KITCHEN WHICH WAS REDOLENT OF TANGY CHOWDER. THERE WERE TWO WOMEN, WHOM HE INTRODUCED AS HIS WIFE, AND HIS DAUGHTER HEATHER...

'TIS A RISKY BUSINESS PUTTING OUT T' SEA THIS NIGHT, MR. SHANNON! THAT YOU SURVIVED AT ALL IN A LAUNCH WAS A GREAT BIT OF LUCK!

AYE, CAP'N DANIELS! GREAT LUCK, INDEED!



THE TWO CASTAWAYS WERE TAKEN TO A BEDROOM ON ANOTHER FLOOR WHERE THEY REMOVED THEIR SOPPING CLOTHES. WRAPPED IN BLANKETS, THEY RETURNED DOWNSTAIRS...

HEATHER, BRING OUR GUESTS SOME CHOWDER NOW! AND HAVE A CARE WITH THEIR CLOTHES.

AYE, FATHER.



CAPTAIN DANIELS EAGERLY TALKED AND ASKED QUESTIONS, AS LON SHANNON, GREEDILY ADMIRING HEATHER'S BEAUTY, ANSWERED ABSENTLY. AT LAST THEIR CLOTHES WERE FULLY DRIED...

YE'LL FIND COMFORTABLE BEDS UP THERE, LADS! I KNOW YE MUST BE TIRED!

OH... A WEE BIT, CAP'N! A WEE BIT!



THEY DRESSED, AND AS SHANNON WAS ABOUT TO GO DOWNSTAIRS, SCOLLAY GRIPPED HIS ARM, LEERING.

NOW, LOOKIE, SHANNON! YE AIN'T GOIN' T' HOG THE PRETTY WENCH ALL T' YESELF, ARE YE?

YOU'D BEST BE STAYIN' UP HERE, SCOLLAY... YOU NEED REST!



WHEN SHANNON REACHED THE KITCHEN HE WAS PLEASED TO FIND HEATHER ALONE. THE CAPTAIN AND HIS WIFE HAD RETIRED. FOR A WHILE THEY TALKED, UNTIL...

'TIS GETTING LATE. I MUST BE OFF T' BED...

STAY, LASS! THERE'S THINGS I WISH T' SPEAK OF! SURELY, A BONNIE THING LIKE YOU MUST GET LONELY FOR A MAN'S COMPANY!



HIS STRONG ARMS SLIPPED TIGHTLY ABOUT HER, HELD HER CLOSE TO HIM. HIS FACE SNUGGLED CLOSE TO HERS, AS SHE LEANED BACK TRYING VAINLY TO PUSH HIM AWAY, AND SHE GASPED BREATHLESSLY...

NO... PLEASE! YE MUSTN'T DO THIS!

THE STORM OUTSIDE IS BUT A WEE THING COMPARED T' THE STORM INSIDE ME! AYE! EVER SINCE I LAID EYES ON YE, I KNEW I WANTED YE! YE KNEW IT, TOO!



YE KNEW IT AN' YET YE STAYED HERE LATE 'CAUSE YE KNEW I'D COME DOWN AGAIN! YE CAN'T ANSWER ME 'NAY... YE WAS WAITIN' FOR ME! YE WANT ME JUST AS MUCH AS I WANT YOU, HEATHER!

OH... PLEASE, LON... LEAVE ME BE... LON... STOP. STOP...



DON'T STOP ME, HEATHER! I'LL GIVE YE ALL YE WANT IN THE WORLD! I'LL TAKE YE BACK WITH ME... T' THE MAINLAND! I'LL MAKE YE ME WIFE! I'LL GET YE PRETTY THINGS... CLOTHES, JEWELS! I WANT TO WED YE...

...LON...



IT WAS MUCH LATER WHEN LON ENTERED THE ROOM WHERE SCOLLAY WAITED...

'TIS ABOUT TIME YE GOT BACK!

STOW IT! AN' GET YE COAT! WE'RE HEADIN' BACK T' RATSMOUTH... TONIGHT! NOW! 'TIS ONLY TEN MILES!



TEN? THERE'S SOMETHIN' ODD ABOUT THAT! HOW IS IT WE NEVER EVEN SEEN THIS LIGHTHOUSE AFORE T'NIGHT?



I CAN'T BE THINKIN' ABOUT IT NOW! WE MADE IT HERE AND WE'LL MAKE IT BACK! IF I STAY TILL MORNIN', TH' CAP'N WILL HAVE ME WED TH' GIRL!

So, with much difficulty, they put to sea again! and from the start, SCOLLAY WHINED AND CRINGED LIKE A FRIGHTENED SCHOOLGIRL...

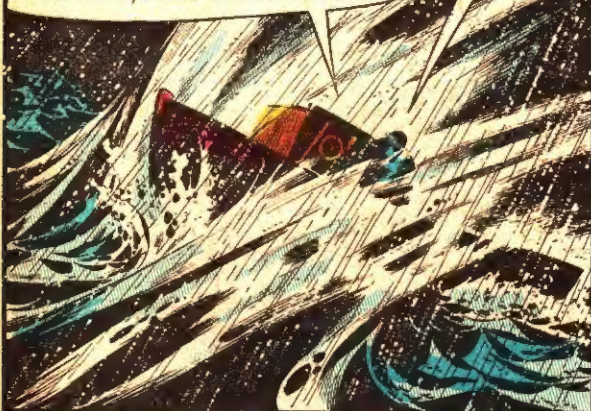
TURN BACK, CHIEF! THE SEA'S TOO ROUGH! WE'LL BE SWAMPED!

STOW IT, YE BILGE-HOUND, OR I'LL THROTTLE YE, SO HELP ME I WILL!



WE'LL NOT MAKE IT, SHANNON! TURN BACK I SAY, OR WE'LL DROWN LIKE RATS! MARK ME WORDS...THE SEA HAG IS OUT T' GET US! AN' IT'S ALL YOUR DOIN'...YOUR FAULT!

SHUT UP, I SAY, YE LOW, SNIVELIN' COWARD!



IT'S ALL AGAINST US! WE GET BEAT BY A STORM AND CHUNKED UP AT A LIGHTHOUSE WHAT DIDN'T BE THERE TILL T'NIGHT! AN' NOW 'CAUSE O' THAT GIRL AN' YE LYIN' WORDS, YE MADE US BAIT FOR THE SEA HAG!

LEGGO ME ARM! GET AWAY FROM TH' WHEEL, I SAY!

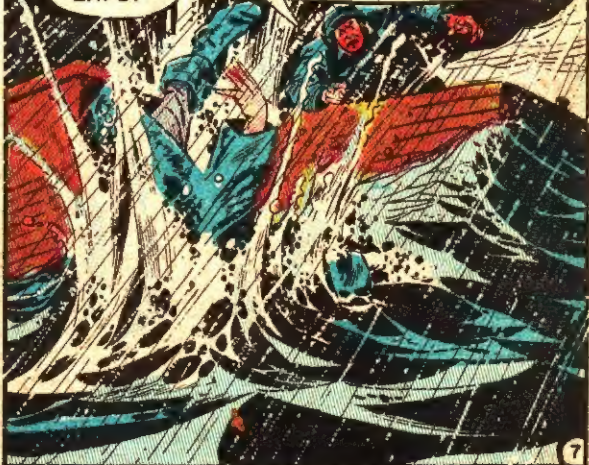


I SHOULD NEVER HA' COME W/ YE, YE BLASTED IDIOT! TURN BACK! TURN BACK! BY HEAVEN, I'LL DO IT MESELF! I'LL NOT LET YE RUN ME T' ME DEATH! GIVE ME THE HELM, OR BY HEAVEN, I'LL...

AVAST! I'VE HAD ENOUGH! YE BLASTED LITTLE PIP-SQUEAK, I'LL HAVE NO MORE OF YE!



THERE! YE'LL MAKE A TASTY TIDBIT FOR YOUR SEA HAG!...IF SHE DON'T CARE WHAT SHE EATS!



THE FUMING SEA SWALLOWED THE LITTLE MAN IN AN INSTANT! AND THEN, EVEN ABOVE THE SHRIEKING FURY OF THE STORM, SHANNON HEARD THE VOICE...

LON...

EH?

HEATHER! YE LITTLE FOOL! WHAT ARE YE DOIN' HERE?

I FEARED YE'D LEAVE WITHOUT ME, LON! I DIDN'T GO TO MY ROOM... I CAME HERE! I HID IN THE CABIN!

LEAVE ME BE! DID YE REALLY THINK I WANTED YE WITH ME, EVEN WHEN I LEFT WITHOUT YE?!

BUT I'M HERE, LON! YE SAID YE'D TAKE ME TO THE MAINLAND! YE SAID YE'D MARRY ME!

YE BLASTED, TRUSTIN' FOOL! YE OUGHT T' KNOW BETTER THAN T' TAKE TH' WORD OF AN EXCITED MAN! MARRIAGE, IS IT? PFAH! NO, LASS! NOT FOR LON SHANNON! YE GO NO FURTHER!

I WANT YE, LON! I'LL NEVER LET YE GET AWAY FROM ME!

ANGRILY, HE STRUGGLED TO THROW HER INTO THE SEA! SUDDENLY, HER ARMS GRIPPED HIM WITH A STRENGTH HE HAD NEVER KNOWN! HE BLINKED THE RAIN FROM HIS FACE TO SEE MORE CLEARLY, FELT OTHER ARMS GRIP HIM... FRIGHTFUL, POWERFUL ARMS, SLITHERING ABOUT HIM...

YE'LL NEVER GET AWAY FROM ME, LON!

HE FELT HIMSELF BEING PULLED TOWARD THE ANGRY, SPUMING SEA, AND HE FOUGHT HELPLESSLY TO FREE HIMSELF! DESPERATELY, HIS SCREAM SOUNDED LOUD ABOVE THE STORM... AS THE SEA HAD SLID EASILY INTO THE WATER WITH HER PRIZE!

HEH, HEH! WELL, NOT ONLY WAS SHANNON A GOOD SEAMAN, HE WAS A GOOD *LUBBER*, TOO... AS HEATHER WILL TESTIFY! AND *SCOLLAY*... SUCH A *SQUARE*! BUT, ACTUALLY, *EVERY-ONE* IN THE STORY WAS *FOOLISH*... WEREN'T THEY *ALL WET*? HEH! AH, ME! I GUESS THAT'S ENOUGH! THE CRYPT-KEEPER IS PATIENTLY TRYING TO BE PATIENT! HE FOLLOWS NEXT, SO TILL WE MEET LATER ON, I'LL BE *SEAI*NG YOU!

THE
END

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! GHASTLY GREETINGS, YOU OLD GHOULISH GLUTTONS! OOPS! NO OFFENSE INTENDED...REMEMBER, THERE'S NO *GHOUL* LIKE AN *OLD* GHOUL! NOW SLITHER RIGHT INTO MY CREEPY *CRYPT OF TERROR* AND LET YOUR CORPSE-COLLECTING *CRYPT-KEEPER* HORRIFY YOU WITH A HORRENDOUS HISTORY RIGHT OUT OF MY PRIVATE *SHOCK*! IT'S ABOUT TWO MONEY-MAD MOPES WHO WERE STRICTLY FROM *HUNGARY*! THEY'D HAVE DONE *ANYTHING* FOR A FAST *FORINT*! (FORINT? THAT'S *DOUGH*, SCHMOE!) I'VE NAMED THIS MAGGOTY MORSEL OF GRAVEDIGGER'S DELIGHT...

COFFIN SPELL!



JACK
DAVIS

FROM THE MOMENT THEY HAD PRIED OPEN THE COFFIN-LID, AND THE DEATHLY-SWEET STENCH OF ROTTED FLESH FILLED THEIR NOSTRILS, THEY KNEW THEIR LABORS HAD BEEN WASTED. NADYI LIFTED THE PUTRESCENT REMAINS TO A SITTING POSITION, AND JANOS RAKOCZY GRUNTED WITH DISGUST...THERE WOULD BE NO PAY THIS NIGHT...

NEVERTHELESS, NADYI HUNA AND JANOS RAKOCZY CAREFULLY WRAPPED THE FRAGILE REMAINS AND PLACED THEM IN THEIR CART. THEY BEGAN THE JOURNEY BACK TO THE CITY OF BUDAPEST...

PEAH! THREE HOURS OF BACK-BREAKING WORK...AND WHAT WILL DR. KAROLYI PAY US FOR THIS WORM-EATEN SPECIMEN?
NOT ONE FORINT!

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND ENOUGH FRESH CADAVERS TO KEEP THE DOCTOR AND HIS STUDENTS SUPPLIED, JANOS!

PERHAPS THE SKELETON WILL BRING US ENOUGH FOR A DRINK!

PHAH! I WORK LIKE A SLAVE FOR ONE SWALLOW OF WINE!



AFTER THEY HAD ARRIVED AT THE UNIVERSITY AND DR. KAROLYI HAD SEEN WHAT THEY HAD BROUGHT, HE RAGED TILL THEY COWERED...

DOGS! FILTHY GRAVE ROBBERS! I PAY YOU GLADLY **ONE HUNDRED FORINTS** FOR EACH CADAVER YOU BRING IN GOOD CONDITION! AND IF **YOU TWO** CANNOT SUPPLY ME, THERE ARE **OTHERS WHO CAN!**

IMAGINE, JANOS! A **HUNDRED FORINTS** FOR EACH BODY! WE HAVE TO FIND MORE...WE HAVE TO!

YES, NADYI... BUT **WHERE?**



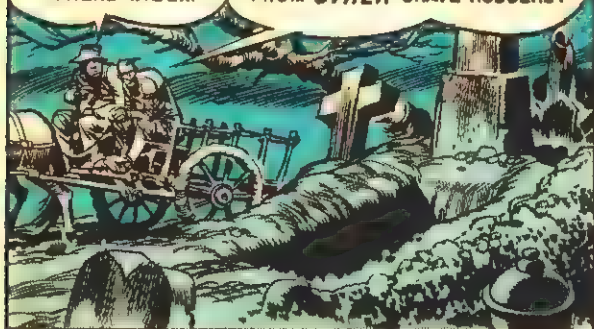
JANOS AND NADYI DROVE THEIR CREAKY CART FROM GRAVEYARD TO CEMETERY, WITH NO SUCCESS. WHAT RECENT BODIES HAD BEEN BURIED IN THEM, THEY HAD DUG UP AND SOLD DURING THE PAST FORTNIGHT...

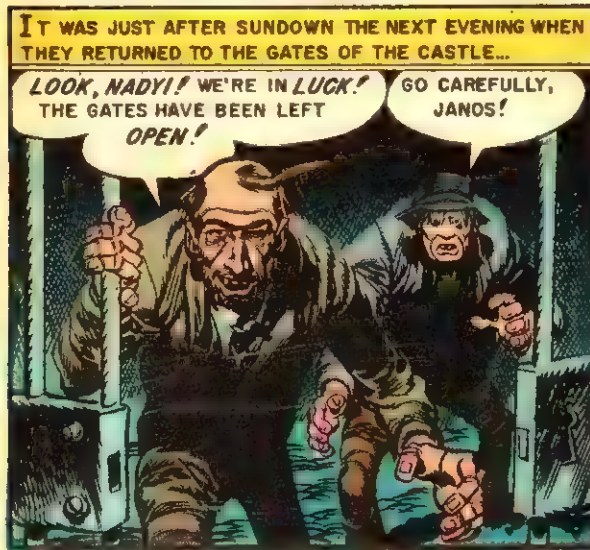
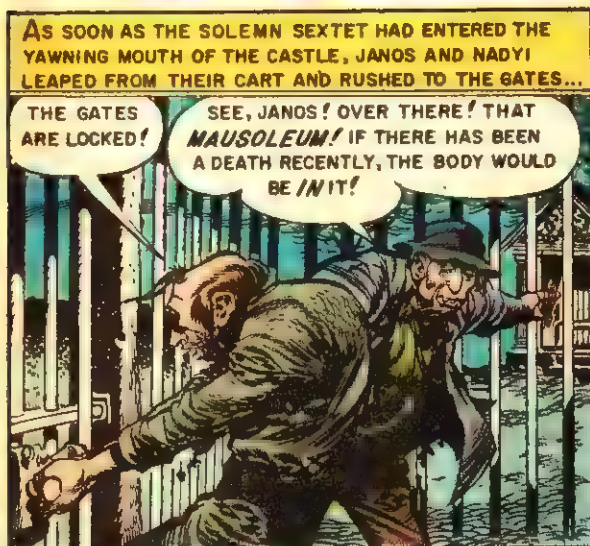
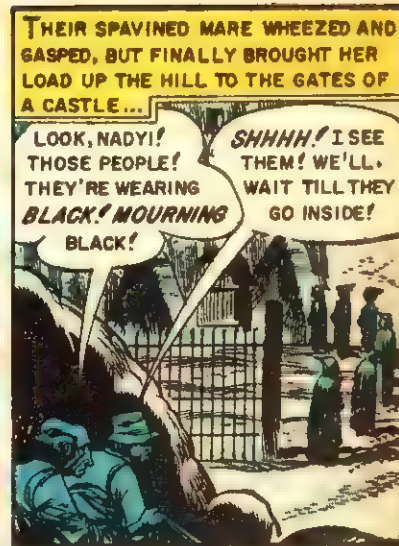
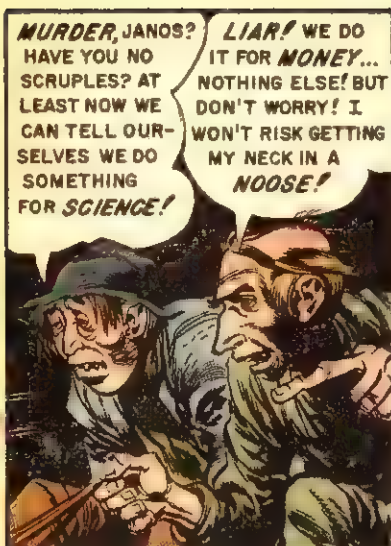
HMP! WHAT CAN HE BUY FROM THEM? THERE ARE JUST NO CADAVERS TO BE **HAD**, JANOS!

I KNOW! NADYI, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I'M TEMPTED TO **MAKE** MY OWN DEAD BODIES!

LOOK, JANOS! A FRESH GRAVE! TOMORROW NIGHT THERE WILL...

YES! **TOMORROW!** BUT WHAT ABOUT **TONIGHT?** WE LOSE A **FORTUNE** IF DR. KAROLYI BUYS FROM **OTHER GRAVE ROBBERS!**





THEY TIP-TOED INTO THE BIG MAUSOLEUM AND BEHELD EIGHT SHINY NEW COFFINS, THE LIGHT OF EIGHT GREAT CANDLES SHIMMERING ON THEIR VARNISHED SURFACES...

EIGHT FRESH BODIES, JANOS! I WONDER HOW SO MANY OF ONE FAMILY DIED AT ONE TIME?

A PLAGUE, PERHAPS! WHO CARES? EIGHT HUNDRED FORINTS, THAT'S WHAT MATTERS!



...AND IF WE TAKE THE COFFINS WE COULD GET A THOUSAND FORINTS MORE! DO YOU THINK WE COULD DO IT?

FOR ALL THAT MONEY, WE COULD DO ANYTHINGS! BUT I'LL HAVE TO GET A BIGGER WAGON!



CAUTIOUSLY, JANOS MOVED TO THE MAUSOLEUM DOOR. NADYI GRASPED HIS ARM, HIS PINCHED FACE WORRIED...

YOU'LL GET A BIGGER WAGON? YOU MEAN I AM TO STAY HERE ALONE? WHAT IF THE FAMILY SHOULD RETURN? I...

AND WHO IS TO OPEN THE GATE SHOULD THEY LOCK IT? NO, YOU MUST REMAIN HERE!

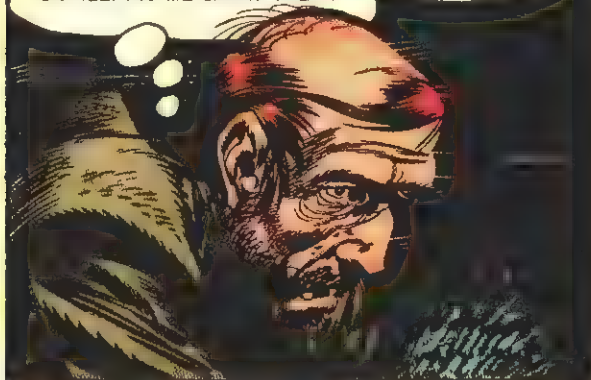


TWILIGHT FLED IN THE FACE OF THE ONCOMING NIGHT AS JANOS SNAPPED THE REINS ON THE BONY BACK OF THE AGED MARE. STARTLED OUT OF A PEACEFUL SLUMBER, SHE LURCHED FORWARD AND THE CART GROANED AFTER HER DOWN THE ROAD...



ON THE JOURNEY TO THE CITY, JANOS RAKOCZY HAD TIME FOR MANY THOUGHTS... EVIL, GREEDY THOUGHTS...

SELLING THE COFFINS IS A GOOD IDEA! BUT NADYI DOES NOT DESERVE TO SHARE IN THE PROFIT! I WILL HAVE TO ARRANGE IT, SO THAT I WILL PAY HIM ONLY FOR HELPING ME CARRY THEM!



SEVERAL HOURS HAD CREPT BY BEFORE JANOS RETURNED TO THE CASTLE WITH THE LARGER WAGON. A QUARTER MOON HAD CLIMBED HIGH IN THE HEAVENS AND THE GRAVE ROBBER MOVED IN STEALTH TOWARD THE MAUSOLEUM...



HE ENTERED THE BURIAL CHAMBER. A DRAFT MADE THE EIGHT CANDLES DANCE DRUNKENLY, AND JANOS' LONG SHADOWS LEAPED ABOUT THE WALLS IN A MAD FRENZY AS HE CUPPED HIS HANDS AND WHISPERED...

NADYI! NADYI!
WHERE ARE YOU?

FROM BEHIND THE FARTHEST COFFIN, NADYI ROSE SO NOISELESSLY THAT JANOS HEARD HIM ONLY WHEN HE SPOKE. JANOS WHIRLED, HIS HEART THUMPING...

...EH? OH, IT'S
YOU, JANOS!

FOOL! YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER
THAN TO SLEEP! YOU MIGHT HAVE
BEEN CAUGHT!

HURRIEDLY, JANOS FASTENED THE EIGHT COFFIN-LIDS IN PLACE...

I GOT THE WAGON, NADYI! LET'S
WASTE NO TIME...TAKE HOLD OF
THIS COFFIN!

TOGETHER THEY MADE THEIR WAY
PAST THE DARKENED CASTLE TO THE
GATES. THERE WAS NO SOUND SAVE
THE HIGH-PITCHED SQUEAL OF BATS
SOARING OVERHEAD...

THEY WORKED QUICKLY, SILENTLY...
STILL, AN HOUR PASSED BEFORE THE
LAST COFFIN WAS STACKED...

ACH! TOMORROW OUR
BONES WILL ACHE, MY
FRIEND!

LET US
GET AWAY
FROM THIS
PLACE!

IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER FOR THE MARE GOING DOWNHILL, BUT BECAUSE OF HER HEAVY LOAD SHE HAD TO BRACE HERSELF LEST THE WAGON SEND HER SKITTERING OUT OF CONTROL! JANOS SPOKE...

NADYI!...I...I AM GOING TO PAY YOU
ONLY FOR HELPING ME CARRY THE
COFFINS! YOU DO NOT WISH TO
ARGUE, EH?

WHATEVER
YOU SAY,
JANOS!

JANOS WAS SURPRISED... AND DISTURBED... BY NADYI'S QUIET ACCEPTANCE OF HIS PLAN! HE HAD EXPECTED AN ARGUMENT...PERHAPS A FIGHT... BUT THIS ACTION SO FOREIGN TO NADYI'S NATURE FRIGHTENED HIM...

HA! I WAS ONLY JOKING! YOU'LL GET
YOUR FAIR SHARE...FIFTY-FIFTY! HA!

ANYTHING
YOU SAY,
JANOS!

THEY RUMBLER OVER THE BUMPY ROAD IN SILENCE...UNTIL THEY CAME TO A FORK. THEN JANOS SAT UP...

HEY! YOU'RE TAKING THE WRONG ROAD! THIS IS NOT THE WAY TO THE UNIVERSITY!

WE CAN'T DRIVE THROUGH BUDAPEST WITH A WAGONLOAD OF COFFINS, JANOS! A POLICEMAN MIGHT SEE US!



WE'LL LEAVE THE COFFINS AT OUR PLACE!

YOU'RE RIGHT! THEN WE'LL PUT THE BODIES IN OUR CART AND GO TO VISIT DR. KAROLYI!



THEY REACHED THEIR DILAPIDATED HUT AND UNLOADED THE WAGON...

IMAGINE THE LOOK ON HIS FACE WHEN HE SEES THEM! EIGHT NEW BODIES! AND EIGHT HUNDRED FORINTS FOR US, EH, NADYI?



ONE BY ONE THE COFFINS WERE BROUGHT INTO THE HOVEL AND PLACED ON THE FLOOR. JANOS WAS IN HIGH SPIRITS BECAUSE OF THEIR SUCCESSFUL VENTURE!

AH! THIS IS THE LAST ONE! DR. KAROLYI WON'T HIRE OTHER GRAVE ROBBERS AFTER THIS, EH?



WITH A HEAVY SIGH, JANOS SAT DOWN ON A ROUGH WOODEN CHAIR, TILTED IT BACK AGAINST THE WALL AND, WITH AN AIR OF LUXURY, LIGHTED HIS OLD, FOUL-SMELLING PIPE. NADYI SAT NEARBY, HIS HEAD NODDING...

I'M VERY TIRED...

THERE IS NO HURRY. WE'VE EARNED A REST!



IT WAS NOT A NOISE, BUT RATHER SOME INSTINCT THAT DREW JANOS' EYES TO THE COFFINS. WHAT HE SAW THERE ROBBED HIM OF HIS VOICE! HIS PIPE DROPPED FROM HIS GAPING, QUIVERING LIPS...



SUDDENLY, FEAR OVERCAME SHOCK! HE JUMPED UP, GRABBED NADYI BY THE ARM, AND POINTED A TREMBLING FINGER...

NADYI! THE COFFINS! LOOK AT THE COFFINS!



EIGHT PAIRS OF COLD, CLAMMY HANDS LIFTED EIGHT COFFIN-LIDS! EIGHT BODIES, SWATHED IN BLACK, ROSE FROM EIGHT COFFINS, EIGHT DEATHLY PALE VAMPIRES, THIRSTING FOR WARM, HUMAN BLOOD, TURNED BEADY, GLITTERING EYES ON JANOS WHO STOOD TRANSFIXED! IT WAS NADYI WHO BROKE THE SPELL...



JANOS! QUICK! THIS WAY!

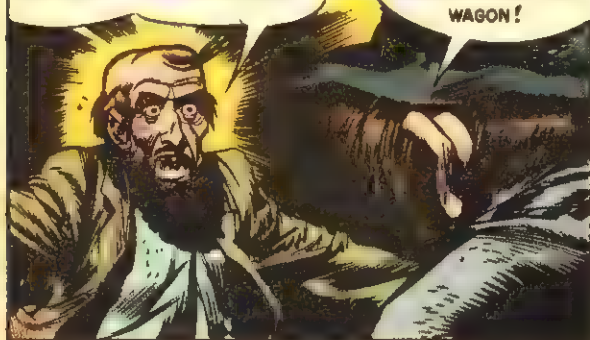
JANOS GALVANIZED INTO ACTION! THEY FLED INTO THE WINDOWLESS ROOM...

SHUT THE DOOR, NADYI! BOLT IT!



VAMPIRES! DO YOU KNOW ABOUT VAMPIRES, NADYI? THEY DRAIN YOUR BLOOD...AND THEIR BITE TURNS A MAN INTO A VAMPIRE, TOO!

I KNOW, JANOS! I FOUND THAT OUT BEFORE...WHEN YOU WENT TO GET THE WAGON!



EH? WHA...? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I... I FOUND OUT ABOUT THE BLOOD-DRAINING AND THE BITES, JANOS... IN THE MAUSOLEUM! THEY CAUGHT ME!



WHA...? NADYI! YOU MEAN YOU... AAAAGGH!

YES, JANOS! I'M A VAMPIRE NOW! AND SOON YOU WILL BE TOO!



-THE
END-

HEH, HEH! THERE YOU HAVE IT, LITTLE KIDDIES! NO WONDER NADYI BOY LOST INTEREST IN MONEY...ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS PUT THE BITE ON JANOS! HEH! AND WITH THAT THOUGHT I GIVE YOU INTO THE CLAMMY HANDS OF V.K. FOR SAFEKEEPING (?) UNTIL NEXT WE MEET IN O.W.'S MAG, THE HAUNT OF FEAR!





PINCH!



From the stern of the little lobster boat, Borley watched Captain Pritchard through narrowed eyes. While the boat churned in the rough water, like a chip of wood caught in a whirlpool, Borley went over his plan for the last time. That fool Pritchard had left him no choice: by catching Borley in the act of rifling his wallet, then swearing he'd bring him back so that harbor police could pinch Borley for robbery, Pritchard had sealed his own death warrant. For how could the potbellied skipper know that his one-man crew was a three-time loser? That one more arrest meant the rest of his life behind granite walls, for Borley?

Even as he stepped forward cat-quick, the spike gripped in his hamlike hand, Borley thought elatedly of the holdful of lobsters down below. Even as he slashed out the heavy steel rod, Borley was estimating how much the lobster catch would bring when he docked.

The spike fell with shattering force. It was the work of a minute to lug the blood-spattered corpse to the rail and hurl it over the side.

"So long, Cap Pritchard," Borley howled. "Now the boat's *mine* and the lobsters downstairs belong to ME! And you... you fat little pig... you're nothing but food for the fish!"

Borley swigged from the half-empty bottle beside the wheel, his face creased in a joyous grimace. *I'll dock the boat, sell the lobsters and skedaddle*, he thought. *And if anyone's nose-y about the Cap, I'll tell 'em I left ol' Pritchard on Corcas Island, the far side of the lobster grounds. Belly-ache, I'll tell 'em... Pritchard wanted me to bring in the catch, then come back for 'im later!*

Intriguing sums of money began to swirl through Borley's brain... exactly how much,

in dollars and cents, would he get for those razor-clawed devils down in the hold? He began to twitch and sweat in a panic of anxiety; for long minutes he held out but, finally, he could stand the suspense no longer. Lashing the wheel dead-ahead, he pulled back the hatch cover and peered down into the darkness of the hold. *Must be a thousand of them dirty green monsters down there*, he gloated, *swarming over one another like a bunch of ants!* Borley bent lower to see better in the eerie half light, and his foot slid on the slick wood. With a roar, he plunged forward. And downward.

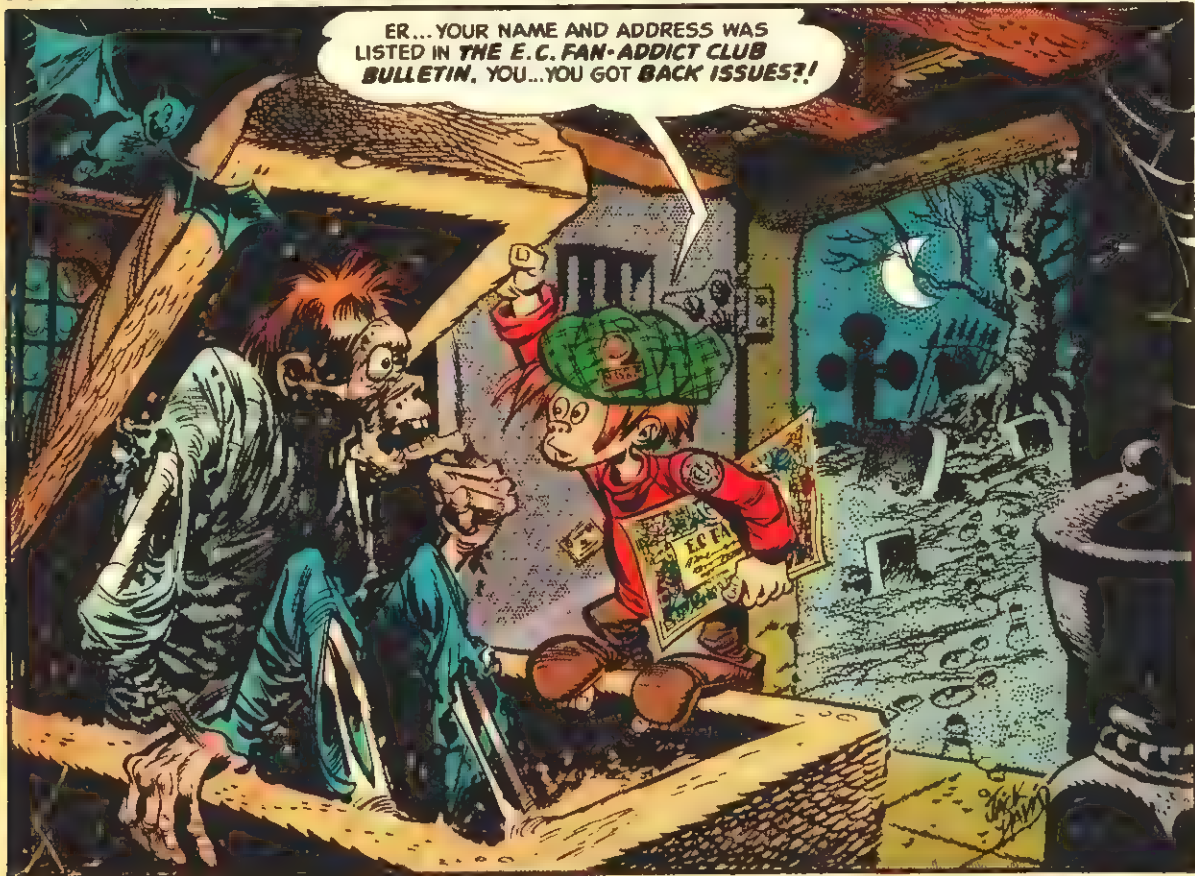
Landing amidst the wet, writhing mass, he felt it yield as he sank into the hideous muck of smashed lobsters. His brain screamed for him to squirm free, but there was nothing to grip... nothing he could use to pull himself out of this stinking inferno.

They were on him now, scuttling across his body in seething slithery hordes. Their beady little eyes swiveled and glared at him, their wand-like antennae twitched like radar bombsights zeroing in for the kill. Borley shrieked and thrashed frantically, but it was too late. A hundred slimy green claws were probing his body... crunching his flesh between pincers strong and deadly as steel. Borley was aware of his skin being ripped by those relentless claws, of blood gushing from severed arteries in his wrists, legs and throat. And his last thought, before unconsciousness engulfed him in a spasm of red-hot agony, was something he'd heard someone say... some-time... somewhere...

Vaguely, as the life was crushed out of his tortured body, the echo of distant words clicked through Borley's brain: ... *fat little pig... nothing... but... food for the fish...*

NOW...IF YOU JOIN...YOU GET THE BULLETIN...FREE!

ER...YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS WAS LISTED IN **THE E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB BULLETIN**. YOU...YOU GOT **BACK ISSUES?!!**



YES, FANS... YOU, TOO, CAN BE LUCKY LIKE MELVIN, HERE! YOU, TOO, CAN COMPLETE YOUR COLLECTION OF E.C.'S! YOU, TOO, CAN JOIN THE

E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB

AND RECEIVE YOUR **MEMBERSHIP KIT** (WHICH INCLUDES A FULL-COLOR $7\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$ ILLUMINATED CERTIFICATE, A STURDY WALLET IDENTIFICATION CARD, A SNAZZY EMBROIDERED SHOULDER PATCH, AND A STUNNING ANTIQUE BRONZE-FINISH BAS-RELIEF PIN)... PLUS A **FREE SUBSCRIPTION** TO THE **E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB BULLETIN!**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FOR AN **INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP**, WHICH INCLUDES **KIT AND FREE SUBSCRIPTION**, FILL OUT THE COUPON AND SEND IT IN, TOGETHER WITH **50¢*** IF **FIVE OR MORE** OF YOU WANT TO JOIN AS AN **AUTHORIZED CHAPTER**, ENCLOSE **EACH MEMBER'S** NAME AND ADDRESS ALONG WITH **50¢ FOR EACH NAME** AND INDICATE THE **NAME OF THE ELECTED CHAPTER PRESIDENT**. WE WILL NOTIFY **EACH PRESIDENT** OF HIS **CHAPTER NUMBER**. **EACH MEMBER**, CHAPTER OR INDIVIDUAL, WILL RECEIVE HIS KIT **DIRECTLY... PLUS EACH ISSUE OF THE BULLETIN** AS IT COMES OFF THE PRESS.

* (SO WHO'S GONNA FOOT THE BILL FOR THE BULLETINS, US!?)
SURE WE HAD TO RAISE THE PRICE! SO SUE US!

THE E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB
ROOM 706
225 LAFAYETTE STREET
NEW YORK, 12, N. Y.

So here's my 50¢! So I could've joined for half the price a couple of months back! So now I get a bulletin subscription. So who says I want it. So I'm a sucker. So put me down and send me the stuff what the kid's wearing and the bulletin I don't want but I'm paying for...

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____
STATE _____ ZONE NO. _____

* (NO 25¢ MEMBERSHIP WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER JUNE 1, 1954)

THE VAULT-KEEPER'S CORNER

Heh, heh! Let's get right into this one... lots of mail and stuff...

Dear Vault-Keeper,

I think your so-called "comics" are terrible! They put the wrong things in the minds of children. If you ask me, they ought to be banned! Especially E.C.'s!

Michael Vecchio
Southwick, Mass.

P.S. I really think E.C.'s are real gone, but to say you don't like 'em is the best way to get your letter printed!

Worked, didn't it, ya little monster!—V.K.

... As a high-school kid in Honolulu, we used to sing this song about our English teacher named Miss German (to the tune of "My Bonnie"):

Miss German has tuberculosis
Miss German has only one lung
Miss German spits blood by the buckets
And dries it and chews it like gum (yum, yum)!

Rhoda Phillips
Honolulu, Hawaii

Kids are much the same Stateside, Rhoda... only worse!—V.K.

... Every time I read one of your mags I get sick. I think I'm about one of the sickest boys in California!

Ron Montana
Mt. View, Calif.

... Little Willie was no bore

He nailed his sister to the door
His mother cried out kind of faint
"Willie... don't you scratch the paint!"

Ronald Merlo
W. New York, N. J.

This kid doesn't even know what state he lives in!—V.K.

... My little brain has come up with a sizzling idea. Take snapshots of the artists and editors at E.C., have them sign the pictures like you and the other Ghou-Lunatics once did, and then you can sell them. Just imagine, autographed snapshots of all the gang at E.C.—or perhaps a group picture suitable for framing. What do you think?

Jim Hannah
Bradley, Ill.

What do I think? I think it stinks... but as soon as my idiot editors read your letter, they started figuring how much money they could make, so I gotta ask you readers what YOU think! Write in and let me know if you'd be interested! (Say "No.")—V.K.

... I ran into a ghoul one day

His flesh was white as snow,

And everywhere a dead man was

This ghoul was sure to go.

For he is forced to hunt and prowl

Else he cannot survive

He always brings his meat back dead

And never back alive!

Fan-Addict Donna Bowers
Pensacola, Fla.

... I am an E.C. Fan-Addict Club member who has pen-pals in various parts of the world. Whenever I get the chance, I send them issues of "The Vault of Horror." They are simply crazy about them and keep asking for new issues. I think this is a wonderful way of spreading Horror (E.C. style, that is) throughout the world.

Joseph Wagner, Jr.
Trenton, N. J.

... The other day, a friend gave me a magazine of yours which I enjoyed very much. I can truthfully say it was the best horror magazine I have ever read. I would very much like a boy and a girl Pen Pal, age about 15 to 17 years. I am 15 years, 10 months myself.

Margaret Anne Conner
28 Pousley Road West
Glasgow, S.W.I.

... Slowly the jury files into the room

Very soon I shall know my doom

Before the foreman the verdict doth bray

He asks me what I have to say.

"Have mercy," I cry on bended knees

Though the mag I read was not E.C.'s

Its art was sloppy and the plots made me sick!

I was just testing being a non-Fan-Addict!

Now my head is pierced with an iron hook

And to the beaten path I'm took

And made to read imitations that smell

Until I rot and go to... the dogs!

S. Schwartzberg
E.C. Fan-Addict No. 4183

... I like your magazines very much. I think your magazine writers put more effort and thinking into each story. I think you are one of the world's most handsome men, although I have to admit you look a little like women.

Judy Ford
Bowers Beach, Del.

No comment... if I said what's in my mind, we'd be banned!—V.K.

... Billy, in one of his nice new sashes,

Fell into the grate and was burnt to ashes.

Now, although the room grows chilly,

I haven't the heart to poke up Billy.

John Stanley
Napa, Calif.

Before winding up, the commercials. Note (preceding page) that the price of the E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB has gone up! Used to be a quarter... now half-a-buck! Business recession, so my idiot editors raise the price... but you do get the Bulletin free now! (Still not worth it!) But if you have 50c you're not using, why not send it in. I'm sure THEY can use it! And subscriptions... eight issues for a buck... only 20c more than news-stand price! Well, the address for subs, fan-mail, etc. is:

The Vault-Keeper
Room 706, Dept. 38
225 Lafayette Street
N. Y. 12, N. Y.

HEH, HEH! YOU MORBID MEATBALLS WANT MORE, EH?
OKAY, THEN...HERE'S A SUBTERRANEAN SAGA I CALL...

The CATACOMBS

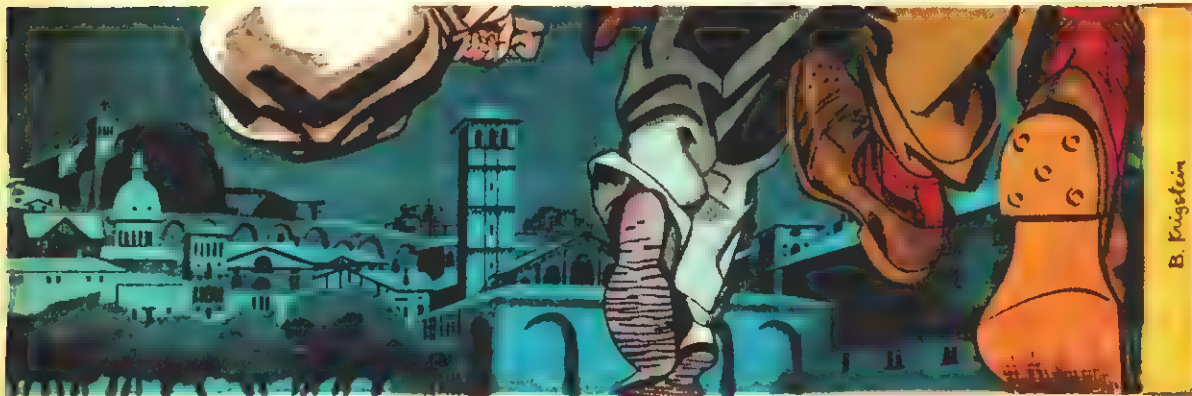


PIETRO MIUTA...

...GRABBED THE SACK
WITH ITS LOAD OF
SILVER...

...AND, WITH GINO ALCARI
FOLLOWING...

...BROKE FOR THE FRONT DOOR!



AS THE FRIGHTENED PAIR
FLED DOWN THE STREET, THE
STARTLED CRIES OF THE
ROBBED OLD MAN SHAT -
TERED THE STILLNESS, THEN
DRIFTED OFF INTO THE SILENT
DARKNESS...



GINO AND PIETRO VANISHED INTO THE NIGHT, DOWN NARROW STREETS AND LITTERED ALLEYS TILL THEY REACHED A BLEAK LITTLE FLAT IN THE SLUMS...



WE'VE MADE A RICH HAUL THIS TIME, GINO!

SOLID SILVER! WORTH THREE, MAYBE FOUR THOUSAND LIRE!

GLEEFULLY, GINO REACHED INTO A CABINET FOR A BOTTLE OF WINE...

"BUT IT IS *MORE* THAN SILVER! IT IS *ANTIQUE*! SOME RICH AMERICAN MAY PAY AS HIGH AS *SIX THOUSAND*!"

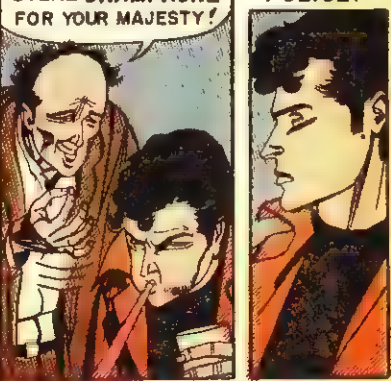
"HAH! BY HEAVEN, THIS CALLS FOR A DRINK!"



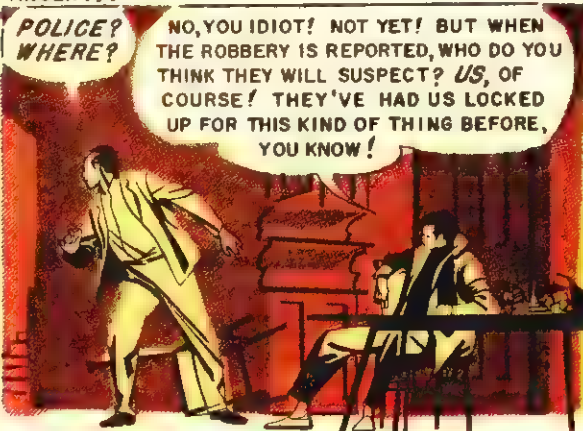
THEY DRANK GREEDILY OF THE CHEAP RED WINE THEN, SUDDENLY, PIETRO SPAT OUT A MOUTHFUL OF THE LIQUID.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU? NEXT TIME I'LL STEAL *CHAMPAGNE* FOR YOUR MAJESTY!

"THE POLICE, GINO! THE POLICE!"



INSTANTLY, GINO WHIRLED TOWARD THE DOOR, KNOCKING HIS CHAIR TO THE FLOOR IN HIS HASTE! HIS FACE WAS CONTOURED WITH A MIXTURE OF BOTH FEAR AND ANGER...



POLICE? WHERE?

NO, YOU IDIOT! NOT YET! BUT WHEN THE ROBBERY IS REPORTED, WHO DO YOU THINK THEY WILL SUSPECT? *US*, OF COURSE! THEY'VE HAD US LOCKED UP FOR THIS KIND OF THING BEFORE, YOU KNOW!

GINO PALED. HIS HANDS CLENCHED AND UNCLENCHED NERVOUSLY AS HE RIGHTED HIS CHAIR...

"WHAT... WHAT CAN WE DO? WE JUST CAN'T THROW IT *AWAY*... NOT AFTER THE CHANCES WE TOOK *GETTING* IT, PIETRO!"

"I DON'T KNOW, WE'LL HAVE TO *HIDE* IT, I GUESS! BUT *WHERE?*"

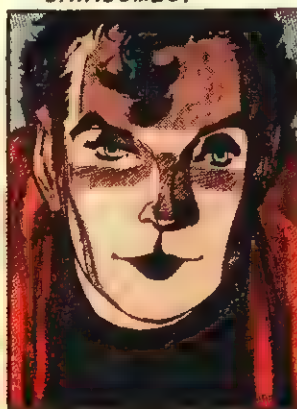


TOGETHER, THEIR BROWS KNITTED IN CONCENTRATION, THEY SAT MULLING OVER THIS NEW PROBLEM.

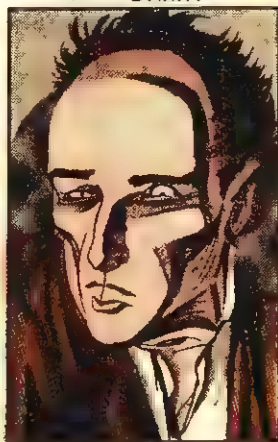


THINK, PIETRO! THINK OF SOMEPLACE TO HIDE THE SILVER!

"I *AM* THINKING! AH! I HAVE IT, GINO! THE *CATACOMBS*!"



"THE... CATACOMBS? I... I DON'T LIKE TO GO THERE! IT'S SCARY... AND COLD... AND SO *DARK*!"



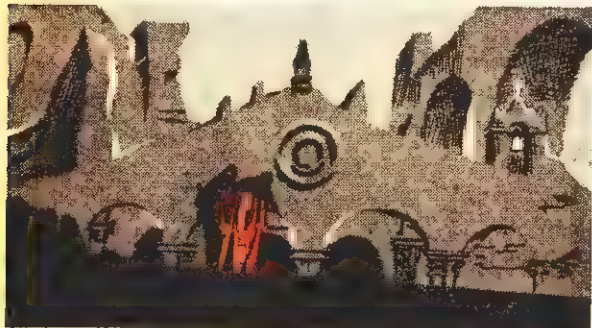
WE WON'T HAVE TO STAY... JUST HIDE THE SILVER TILL IT'S FORGOTTEN ABOUT! WE'LL TAKE A LANTERN, MY FRIEND, AND WINE TO WARM US... *PLENTY OF WINE!*



THE SUN HAD NOT YET RISEN WHEN THE TWO THIEVES REACHED THE CATACOMBS ENTRANCE. PIETRO CARRIED THE SACK OF SILVER AND THE LANTERN, WHILE GINO, TREMBLING IN THE DAMP MORNING AIR, CLUTCHED SEVERAL BOTTLES OF RED WINE IN HIS ARMS...

"I DON'T LIKE THIS, PIETRO! I DON'T LIKE IT AT ALL!"

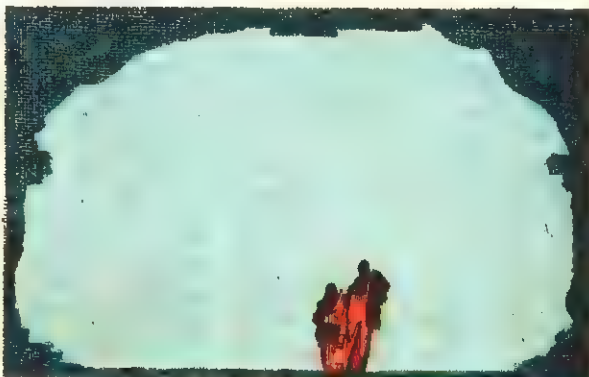
"FOOL! WOULD YOU RATHER SPEND TEN YEARS BEHIND BARS?!"



THEY LOOKED APPREHENSIVELY INTO THE BLACK OPENING...

"I'VE HEARD A MAN COULD GET LOST IN THERE. WOULD YOU KNOW THE WAY OUT AGAIN?"

"I'M NOT SURE. IF THERE WAS SOMETHING WITH WHICH TO MARK A TRAIL..."



PIETRO SUDDENLY GRINNED, SNATCHED A BOTTLE FROM GINO'S ARM AND BROKE OFF ITS NECK...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

WE'LL LEAVE A TRAIL OF RED WINE, GINO... SOMETHING WE CAN FOLLOW BACK!



GINGERLY, THEY STEPPED INTO THE DARK, MUSTY PASSAGE...

MAKE IT A THIN TRAIL, SO THERE'LL BE ENOUGH TO LAST!

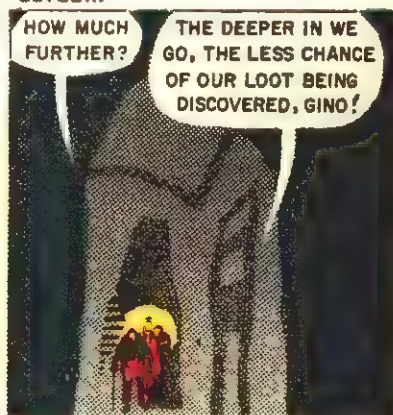
I'LL BE SURE THERE'S ENOUGH LEFT TO DRINK, PIETRO!



THEY MOVED SLOWLY, AIMLESSLY, THROUGH THE DARK GLOOM OF MYRIAD PASSAGES...NOW TO THE RIGHT, THEN LEFT, RIGHT, AND DOWN TO ANOTHER LEVEL...

HOW MUCH FURTHER?

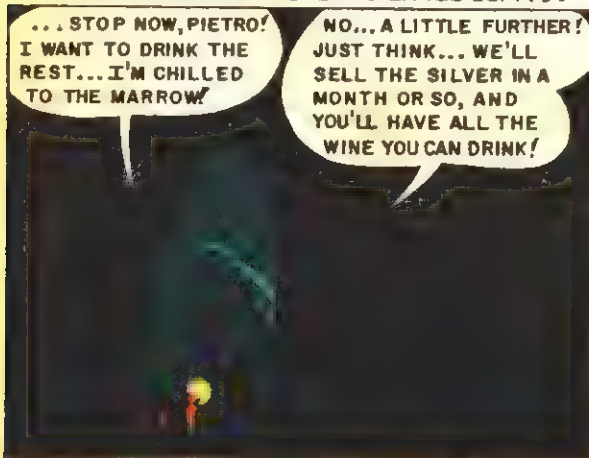
THE DEEPER IN WE GO, THE LESS CHANCE OF OUR LOOT BEING DISCOVERED, GINO!



THEY CONTINUED ON, DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE MAZE OF TUNNELS, AS GINO DRIBBLED THE WINE ONTO THE GRAY DUST UNTIL THERE WAS LITTLE LEFT...

... STOP NOW, PIETRO! I WANT TO DRINK THE REST... I'M CHILLED TO THE MARROW!

NO... A LITTLE FURTHER! JUST THINK... WE'LL SELL THE SILVER IN A MONTH OR SO, AND YOU'LL HAVE ALL THE WINE YOU CAN DRINK!



AT PIETRO'S URGING, THEY WENT ON UNTIL THEY CAME TO A CHAMBER LARGER THAN THE REST. GINO FOLLOWED THE LANTERN BEAM, THEN GRABBED HIS FRIEND'S ARM, HIS STARTLED CRY ECHOING THROUGH THE VAST LABYRINTH...

"LOOK! THERE IN THE WALL!"





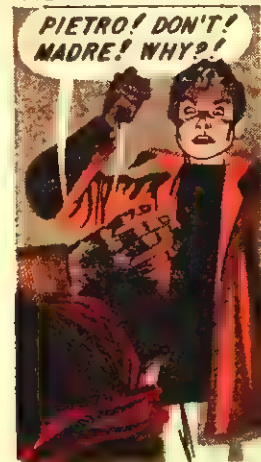
THE LOUD METALLIC CLATTER SHATTERED THE SILENCE! GINO JUMPED AND TURNED, HIS FACE ASHEN IN FRIGHT...



NERVOUSLY, GINO BENT TO GATHER UP THE SILVER, AND AS HE DID, PIETRO SLIPPED A SWITCHKNIFE FROM HIS POCKET. HE FLICKED OPEN A LONG, SCALPEL-SHARP BLADE... "FIVE OR SIX THOUSAND LIRE, "I **AM** THINKING OF PIETRO! JUST THINK OF IT!"



THE 'CLICK' OF THE BLADE BEING OPENED MADE GINO TURN IN TIME TO SEE THE CRUEL, GREEDY LOOK ON PIETRO'S FACE...IN TIME TO SEE THE BLADE FLASH UP...



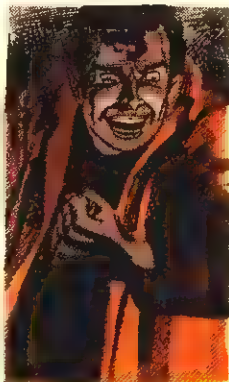
DESPERATELY, GINO TRIED TO BRUSH PAST PIETRO... TRIED VAINLY TO DODGE THE VICIOUS BLADE WHICH FLASHED DOWN, PLUNGED TO THE HILT IN HIS BACK...



SCREAMING IN BITTER AGONY, GINO THRASHED TO HIS FEET AND BLINDLY STUMBLED OFF INTO THE PASSAGEWAY...



"GO AHEAD! RUN!
YOU WON'T LIVE
ONE MINUTE!"



AS GINO'S STUMBLING FOOTSTEPS AND STRANGLING SOBS FADED INTO THE BLACK DISTANCE, THE TREACHEROUS PIETRO SET ABOUT GATHERING THE SCATTERED SILVER...



HEH, HEH! THE RICHEST
HAUL I'VE EVER MADE,
AND THAT STUPID FOOL
REALLY THOUGHT I LED
HIM TO THIS CREEPY
HOLE JUST TO HIDE IT!

HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA

CHUCKLING, HE SLUNG THE SACK OVER HIS SHOULDER AND LEFT THE CHAMBER...

"BY THE TIME THEY FIND HIS BODY...
IF THEY EVER DO... THERE'LL BE
NO TELLING IT FROM THE OTHER
MUMMIES!"



HE WALKED ON, SHARPLY SCANNING
THE FLOOR BY THE LANTERN GLOW...

"HEY! I'VE GONE MORE THAN
FIFTY FEET! I SHOULD HAVE
FOUND THE TRAIL OF WINE
BY NOW!"



HE STOPPED, THEN RETURNED TO
THE CHAMBER, AND WITH HIS FACE
REVEALING DEEP ANXIETY, HE TRIED
ONE PASSAGE, THEN ANOTHER...



AGAIN HE WAS UNABLE TO PICK UP THE TRAIL, AND HE
RETURNED TO THE CHAMBER ONCE MORE TO TRY STILL
ANOTHER PASSAGE! IN THE WANING LANTERN LIGHT,
HE BECAME ALMOST FRENZIED... AND THEN...



AH! THE TRAIL!
FROM HERE ON IT
WILL BE EASY!

SKITTISHLY, PIETRO HURRIED THROUGH THE ENDLESS
MAZE OF VAULTS AND GALLERIES, HIS BREATHING HEAVY
NOW, HIS FOOTFALLS ECHOING ALL ABOUT HIM...



"HOW GOOD IT WILL BE
TO BREATHE FRESH AIR
AGAIN... AND SEE THE
SUNLIGHT!"



HE FOLLOWED THE THIN TRAIL TO ITS END...BUT IT DID NOT END AS IT SHOULD HAVE! PIETRO STOPPED DEAD IN HIS TRACKS AT THE YAWNING MOUTH OF THE PASSAGE, GAPPED INTO A BURIAL CHAMBER AND CHOKED BACK A CRY OF HORROR...

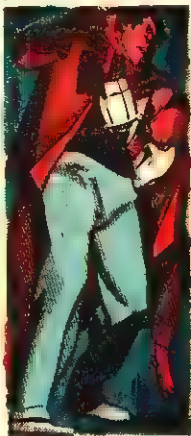


SLOWLY, UNBELIEVINGLY, PIETRO MOVED TO THE BLOOD-LESS BODY LYING IN THE CHAMBER'S DUST, AND WHILE ALL AROUND THE EMPTY-SOCKETED EYES GAPPED DOWN ON HIM, HE RAISED THE LIFELESS FORM AND PLEADED...

"GINO...LISTEN TO ME, GINO! I'M SORRY...GINO, I'M SORRY! WE CAN FIND OUR WAY OUT...TOGETHER. COME, I'LL HELP YOU UP...PLEASE, GINO...THE LANTERN'S GETTING DIM..."



"HURRY, GINO...WE MUST FIND THE RIGHT TRAIL BEFORE THE LANTERN GOES OUT! HEH...HEH...I...THOUGHT YOUR BLOOD WAS THE TRAIL..."



"HEH...I THOUGHT IT WAS THE WINE TRAIL...IT WAS YOUR BLOOD! GINO... THE LIGHT IS FADING! FIND THE RIGHT TRAIL FOR US... HURRY, GINO! *HURRY!*"



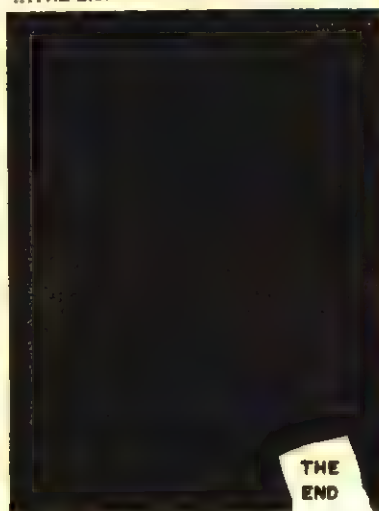
"WHEN WE GET OUT, WE'LL BE FRIENDS AGAIN, EH? GINO, *HURRY!* EH...EH... *HURRY!* EH...THE LIGHT, GINO...YOU CAN FIND THE TRAIL, CAN'T YOU, GINO? EH...EH...GINO? *GINO?*"



...AND THEN...



...THE LIGHT WENT OUT!



HEH, HEH! CRAZY, MIXED-UP KILLER! THAT'S WHAT HE DESERVES FOR STABBING HIS BEST FRIEND IN THE BACK, DOWN THERE! SUCH A *NASTY* THING TO DO! HEH...SHOULD'VE WAITED TILL THEY WERE *OUTSIDE!* HEH, HEH, HEH! WELL, THE CREEPY *OLD WITCH* IS WAITING FOR YOU, SO GOODBYE!



THE
END

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE! WELL, HERE WE ARE AGAIN AT THE *TALE* END OF *V.K.'S MAG*, AND IF YOU GLOOMGRABBERS STILL DON'T HAVE YOUR GUTS FULL OF GRUESOME GORE, YOUR *OLD WITCH* HAS COOKED UP A CHARRED CHUNK OF CHILLING CHAFF THAT IS GUARANTEED TO GLUT EVEN THE GREEDIEST OF GHOULS! SO HOBBLE ON INTO MY HORRIBLE *HAUNT* WHILE I YAMMER AWAY AT A CLAMMY LITTLE CONCOCTION CALLED...

OUT of SIGHT...



MUTTERING OMINOUSLY, THE THUNDERSTORM MOVED ON, LEAVING THE TENT HUMID, HEAVY WITH THE STINKING SWEAT OF THE CROWD AND THE NAUSEATING AROMA OF KEROSENE LAMPS. FOR THE THOUSANDTH TIME CLYDE EVANS LISTENED TO THE BARKER'S CRUDE, GRAVELLY VOICE INTRODUCE HIS ACT, AND HE SWUNG HIS ANCIENT TOP HAT IN A SWOOPING ARC AND BOWED TO THE LOUTISH AUDIENCE...

...AND NOW, FOR YOUR PLEASURE, WE PRESENT THAT **MYSTERIOUS MENTAL MARVEL...** THE ONE, THE ONLY... THE GREAT BRAIN!



THEN THE GREAT BRAIN INTRODUCED HIS ASSISTANT WITH A WELL-WORN QUIP...

FRIENDS, THIS IS MY HELPER... **BIRD BRAIN BENNY!** HE'S STRONG AS AN OX... AND ALMOST AS SMART! BENNY WILL PASS AMONG YOU. SHOW HIM AN OBJECT... **ANY** OBJECT, AND I'LL TRY TO IDENTIFY IT... **BLIND-FOLDED!**



THE YOKELS DIDN'T EVEN SMILE. CLYDE WHIPPED OUT A KERCHIEF AND TIED IT OVER HIS EYES...

DON'T BE BASHFUL, FOLKS! SHOW BENNY ANYTHING... A GOOD-LUCK CHARM... A PHOTOGRAPH... IT'S ALL FREE, FOLKS!

UH... BOSS... UH, GREAT BRAIN, I GOT SOMETHIN' HERE TO **OPEN** THE SHOW...



BENNY'S TIP-OFF WORDS WERE A TIME-WORN GIMMICK WHICH THE GREAT BRAIN HID WITH A QUICK RESPONSE...

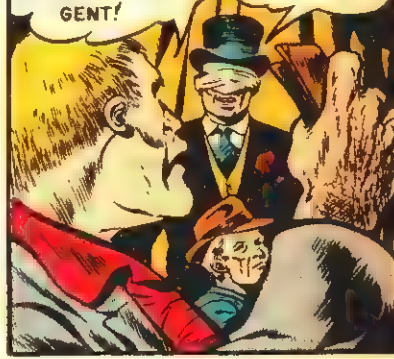
THE OBJECT YOU ARE HOLDING IS... **A KEY!**



NO MURMUR OF APPROVAL FROM THE AUDIENCE... NOT A SINGLE CLAPPING OF HANDS. BENNY SHUFFLED ON TO ANOTHER MAN...

I'M **HOLDIN' UP...** DUH IS SOMETHIN' BELONGIN' TO A GENT!

THAT OBJECT, MY FRIENDS, IS A **BELT!**



THE SOUND OF DERISIVE SNICKERS REACHED THE EARS OF THE GREAT BRAIN! FROM PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES HE KNEW THAT THEIR SIGNALS HAD GONE ASKEW! FURIOUS, HE WHIPPED OFF HIS BLINDFOLD...

THAT AIN'T RIGHT, BOSS! UH... IT'S UH... UH... **A WALLET!**

WHAT...!

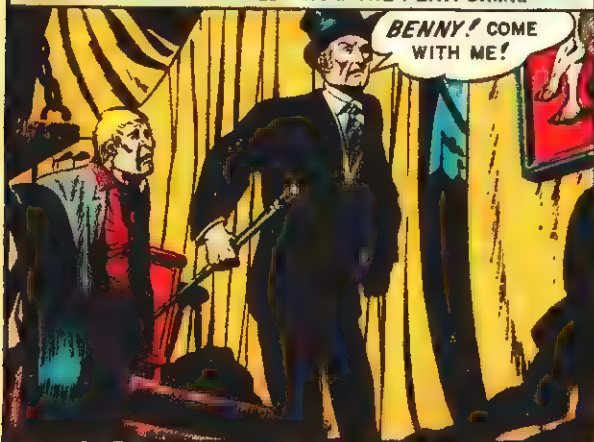


BUT THERE WAS AN ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING, AND THE GREAT BRAIN QUICKLY COMPOSED HIMSELF, SPOKE IN A VOICE THAT DRIPPED HEAVILY WITH STINGING SARCASTIC...

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, SURELY YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THAT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO READ MY HELPER'S MIND... HE JUST **DOESN'T HAVE** A MIND! BUT NOW... IF ANYONE HAS A PERSONAL PROBLEM, I SHALL BE HAPPY TO HELP... FOR A SMALL FEE...



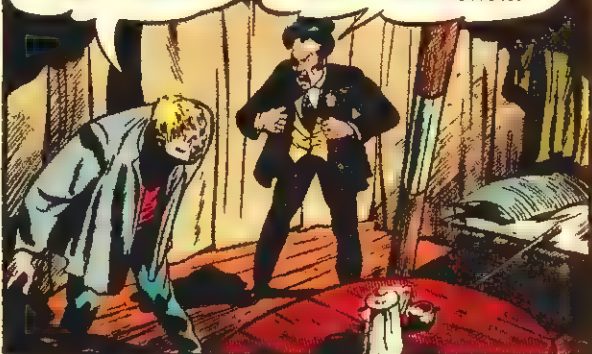
THE GREAT BRAIN'S AUDIENCE SLOWLY TURNED AND SILENTLY STRAGGLED OUT OF THE TENT. NOT ONE REMAINED TO LET HIM EARN HIS SMALL FEE. THE ENRAGED MENTAL MARVEL STALKED FROM THE PLATFORM...



BENNY! COME WITH ME!

BENNY HEINTZ KNEW THAT RING IN THE BRAIN'S VOICE, AND HE FOLLOWED HIM TO A SMALLER TENT, CRINGING LIKE A FRIGHTENED CUR...

I DONE SOMETHIN' WRONG, MORON! I'VE TOLD YOU A HUNDRED TIMES... "I'M HOLDING UP" MEANS A BELT! A BELT! YOU MORON!



DON'T CALL ME THAT, MR. EVANS... I DON'T LIKE YOU CALLIN' ME THAT!

NOT ONE SUCKER STAYED, BECAUSE OF YOU! NOT ONE CENT HAVE I TAKEN IN! YOU STUPID LOU!



CLYDE'S TEMPER EXPLODED WITH AN ENDLESS LINE OF FOUL OATHS! AGAIN AND AGAIN HIS HEAVY CANE HISSSED DOWN ON BENNY'S TORTURED BACK!

MORON! MORON! MORON!

UNGH...



WHEN CLYDE STOPPED, IT WAS ONLY FROM EXHAUSTION. SLOWLY BENNY ROSE TO HIS FEET, HIS APELIKE ARMS DANGLING... AND HE SPOKE THROUGH SWOLLEN LIPS...

I'M GONNA KILL YOU, MR. EVANS...

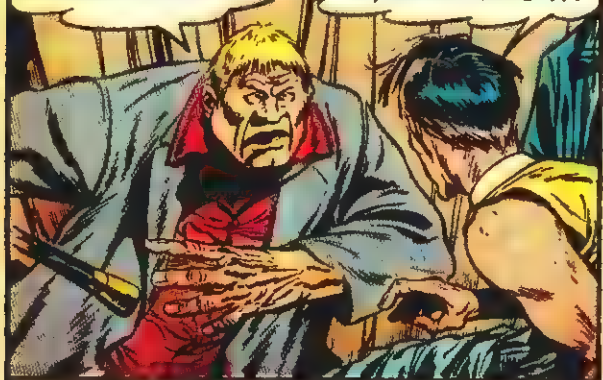
GET OUT OF HERE, BENNY!



THE USUAL AUTHORITY WAS LACKING FROM CLYDE'S VOICE. HE RAISED HIS CANE IN DEFENSE ONLY TO HAVE IT SNATCHED FROM HIS GRASP! THE BULL-LIKE BENNY SNAPPED THE THICK SHAFT AS IF IT WERE A TOY AND HURLED IT ASIDE...

I'M GONNA KILL YOU!

NO, BENNY...LISTEN...



DESPERATELY, THE GREAT BRAIN DODGED ASIDE AS BENNY LUNGED FOR HIM! THE SIMPLE BRUTE GRABBED CLUMSILY AT EMPTY AIR AND FELL FORWARD ONTO THE TABLE!

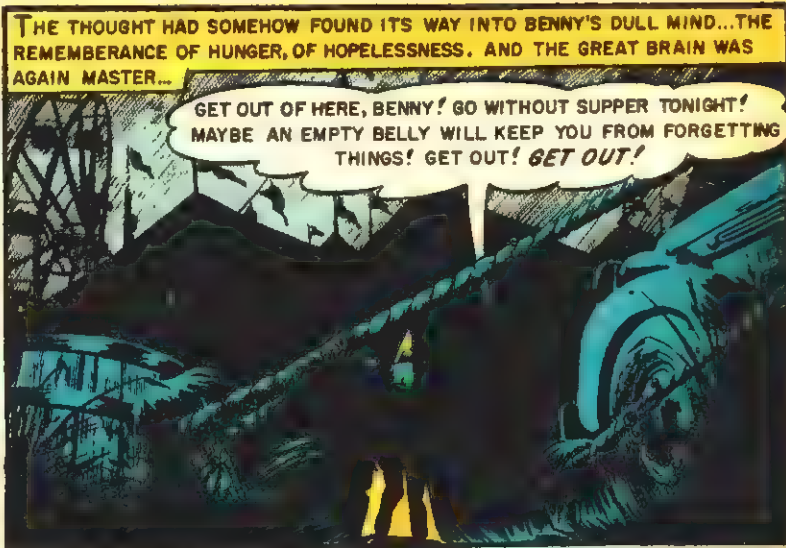
0000FF! SURE, BENNY, KILL ME! THEN WHO WILL FEED YOU? WHO'LL TAKE YOU IN AND GIVE YOU WORK? KILL ME, BENNY... THEN GO BACK TO YOUR GUTTER AND STARVE!





COME ON, BENNY...
YOU'RE STRONG!
YOU CAN DO IT!
KILL ME! KILL
ME!

I ...DÜH...I DIDN'T
MEAN THAT, MR.
EVANS! HONEST,
MR. EVANS...I...
UH...I WOULDN'T DO
NOTHIN' TO HURT
YOU!



THE THOUGHT HAD SOMEHOW FOUND ITS WAY INTO BENNY'S DULL MIND...THE
REMEMBRANCE OF HUNGER, OF HOPELESSNESS. AND THE GREAT BRAIN WAS
AGAIN MASTER...

GET OUT OF HERE, BENNY! GO WITHOUT SUPPER TONIGHT!
MAYBE AN EMPTY BELLY WILL KEEP YOU FROM FORGETTING
THINGS! GET OUT! GET OUT!

BRUISED, DAZED,
HIS GREAT
MUSCLES THROB-
BING, BENNY
STUMBLED OUT
INTO THE STIFLING
NIGHT, ALONG
THE CROWDED
MIDWAY. GUIDED
BY THE GARISH
THUMPING OF A
TOM-TOM AND AN
OFF-KEY GUITAR,
HIS DRAGGING,
SHUFFLING FEET
CARRIED HIM TO
THE ONLY ONE
WHO UNDER-
STOOD...THE
ONLY ONE WHO
REALLY CARED...

...SHE SHAKES, SHE SHIMMIES! AND THAT'S NOT ALL,
FOLKS! HULDA PUTS ON A COMPLETE HALF-HOUR SHOW
STARTING IN JUST TEN MINUTES, FOLKS, SO STEP RIGHT
UP AND BUY YOUR TICKETS! TWENTY-FIVE CENTS...
ONLY TWO BITS...



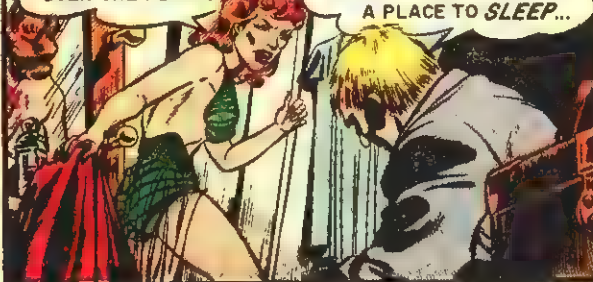
PAINFULLY, HE MOVED PAST THE MAIN
TENT TO A SMALLER DRESSING-ROOM
TENT JUST BEHIND IT. HE STEPPED
INSIDE, PLOPPED HIS HUGE BULK DOWN
ON A DILAPIDATED CHAIR, LISTENING
TO THE CAT-CALLS AND WHISTLES
THAT WERE GREETING HULDA. HE
RESTED...AND WAITED...



YES, HULDA LARSON CARED. SHE COULD MAKE BENNY
REALIZE HE'D BEEN ABUSED...COULD MAKE HIM WEEP WITH
SELF-PITY. SHE RETURNED WHEN HER ACT WAS OVER...

YA BIG GOOF! HOW LONG YA
GONNA LET CLYDE EVANS GET
AWAY WITH PUSHIN' YA ALL
OVER THE PLACE?

AW... I GET MAD, HULDA...
DÜH...BUT WHEN I THINK
HOW BAD IT WAS BEFORE
HE GIVE ME FOOD...AND
A PLACE TO SLEEP...



BUT CLYDE HAD EXPECTED THIS. HE KNEW ABOUT HULDA
AND BENNY... ABOUT THE THOUGHTS SHE PUT IN HIS HEAD...

HE'S NOT DOIN' YA ANY FAVOR, BENNY!
HE'D BE PAYING *TWENTY DOLLARS A
WEEK* FOR A REGULAR ASSISTANT!

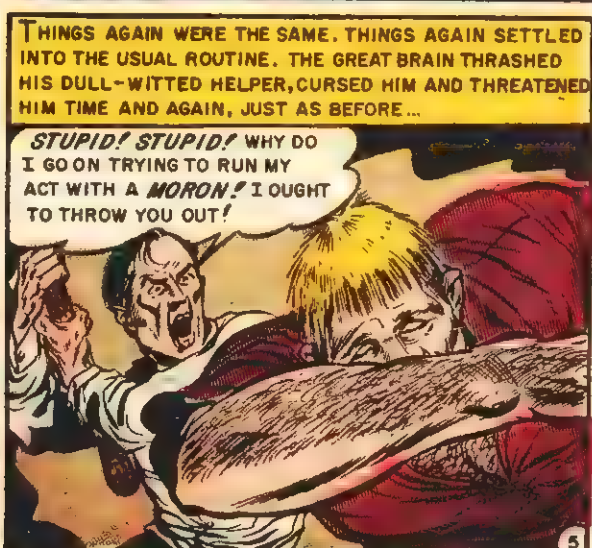
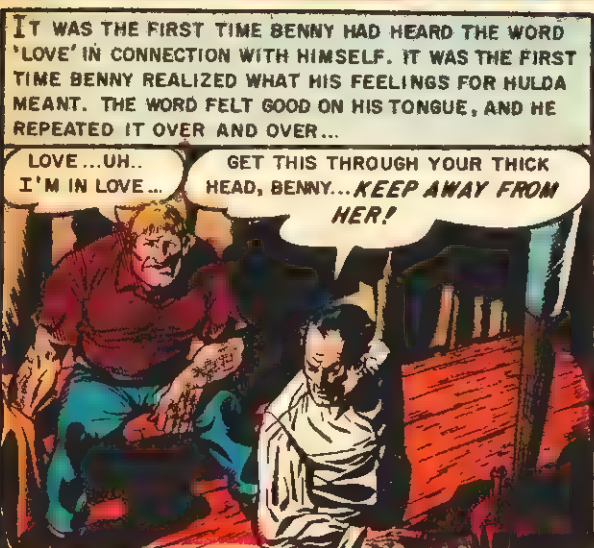
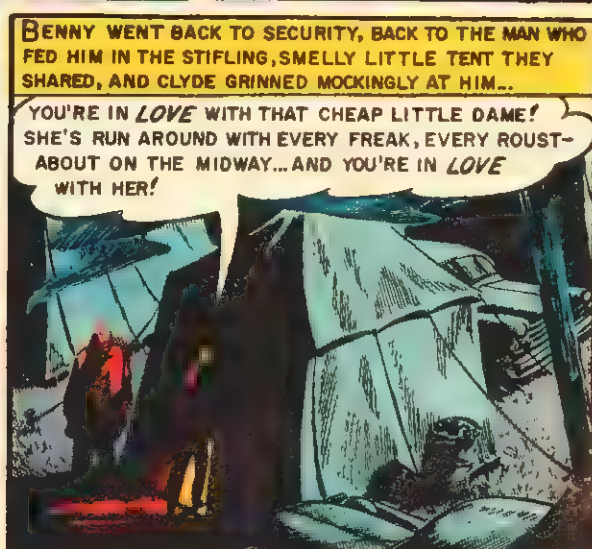




MR. EVANS! YA GOT NO RIGHT CALLING ME NAMES!



YOU'RE *LYING*, MR. EVANS! THERE'S NEVER BEEN *ANYTHING WRONG* BETWEEN BENNY AND ME!

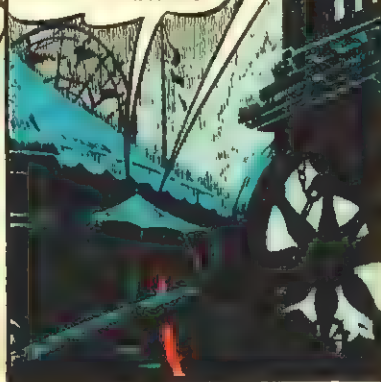


AND AS BEFORE, BENNY FORGOT CLYDE'S WARNING. HE WOULD GO TO HULDA FOR SYMPATHY AND LET HER BATHE HIS SWOLLEN FACE...



HE'S GOT YA BUFFALOED, BENNY! DUH... I CAN'T DO THAT, HULDA! NOBODY ELSE'D GIVE ME A JOB!

MR. EVANS TELLS YOU THAT SO YOU'LL BE AFRAID TO LEAVE HIM! HE'S A LIAR, BENNY! HE'S A ROTTEN LIAR!



HE SAYS YOU LOVE THE FREAKS, HULDA!

THAT'S A LIE, BENNY! I NEVER DID THAT! I TOLD YA CLYDE EVANS IS A LIAR!

HULDA... DUH... HULDA, I LOVE YOU, HULDA!



THERE WAS SUDDENLY A WARM, INTIMATE SILENCE IN THE SHABBY TENT. FOR A LONG MOMENT THEY GAZED AT ONE ANOTHER, HULDA'S EYES SWIMMING IN MISTY TEARS THAT FINALLY OVERFLOWED AND TRICKLED DOWN HER CHEEK...

OH, BENNY... I LOVE YOU TOO, DARLING!

I'M HAPPY, HULDA... DUH... YOU ALWAYS MAKE BENNY HAPPY!



SOME HOURS LATER, BENNY RETURNED TO THE GREAT BRAIN'S TENT. AS USUAL, CLYDE WAS FURIOUS...

YOU WERE WITH HULDA AGAIN. WEREN'T YOU? I TOLD YOU TO STAY AWAY FROM HER! BY HEAVEN, IF IT WEREN'T ALMOST TIME FOR MY ACT, I'D BEAT YOU TO WITHIN AN INCH OF YOUR LIFE!

HULDA SAYS YOU LIED, MR. EVANS! SHE ...DUH... DON'T LOVE THE FREAKS!



I DON'T CARE WHAT SHE SAID! I WANT YOU TO KEEP AWAY FROM HER! SHE'S NO GOOD FOR YOU, UNDERSTAND!? STAY AWAY FROM HER!

...HULDA SAYS ME AN' HER SHOULD GET MARRIED TOGETHER...



THE QUIETLY SPOKEN WORDS HAD THE IMPACT OF A BOMB! THE GREAT BRAIN STOOD STOCK STILL, TREMBLING WITH FURY... THEN, ABRUPTLY, HE TURNED AND STRODE FROM THE TENT...

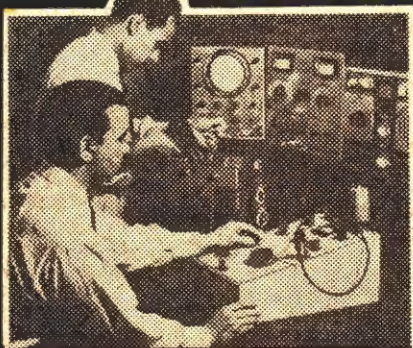
WHERE YA GOIN', MR. EVANS? DUH... YOU AIN'T MAD AT ME, HUH? MR. EVANS...?



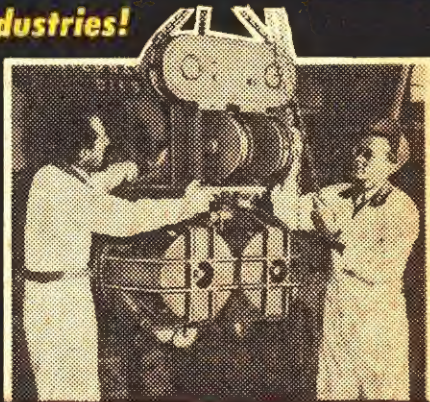


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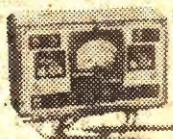


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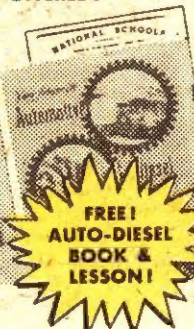


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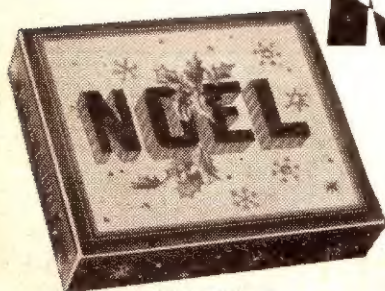
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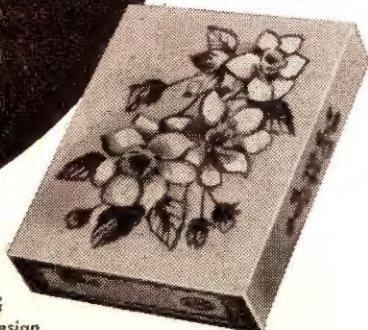
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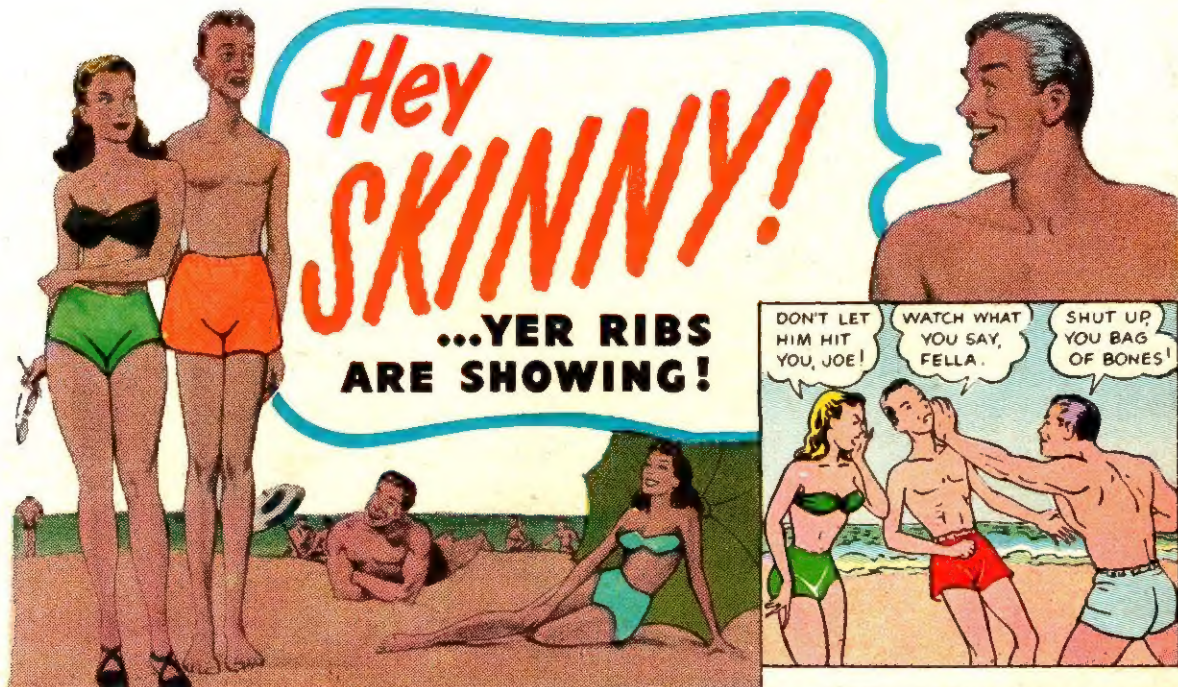
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